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Preachers, Preaching And The Preached To.

In almost every religious periodical or magazine, I notice that amongst the advertisements, reviews, or editorial notes, such and such books highly recommended as valuable aids to young ministers. In nine cases out of ten, these books so highly commended are either complete sermons or outlines of sermons. There are cases, no doubt, and plenty of them, when it is justifiable and necessary to use such "helps," yet our young ministers should be very careful lest they be in the end injurious instead of beneficial, as our young men may lose self-confidence, and learn to rely solely on such helps. Thus they will become merely the mouthpieces, and sometimes very inferior ones, of other people. Let us cultivate self reliance as much as possible, it is the sure road to success.

A well known writer, in one of the leading magazines, severely criticizes the present method of preaching. He says it is not Apostolic, but merely "a ringing of changes upon texts." What he means by this is hard to tell. But likely he refers to the ingenious manner in which ministers handle solitary quotations, taking them out of their actual connection and surroundings, and making very personal and stinging applications. It may be possible that the instances the writer refers to may have been overdone. It is possible to run everything or anything into extremes. Thus he may have become disgusted and now in a sweeping way condemns it wholesale. In my brief experience—merely that of seven years—I have learned two things.

In the first place, people go to church with peculiar motives. Some go there because it is respectable to go. You can always pick this class out. If they have not been lulled to doze, you will notice the lack of interest in their countenance. They are ready to smile or sneer at the least provocation. These are the great critics, and the preacher must expect a severe handling if he does not come up to expectations.

There are those who merely go with their wives, or their husbands, or their sweethearts. It makes very little difference to this class what the minister says. They are ice bound and impenetrable by ordinary means.

Then there are the regular church goers, mostly church members, who are present because it is their duty to be there. Many of this class take things very coolly. They have heard so many sermons, that to use a manufactured term, are sermon-bound. I have heard of horses being hide-bound, that is the skin sticks so closely to his ribs and back as not to be easily loosened or raised; so in that sense are some people sermon-bound—that is, the sermon sticks so closely to them that it can never be loosened, you never hear of it any more. The conversation immediately after the benediction amen turns on crops, weather or any other topic but the sermon.

We must not forget that indescribable class, whose motives are beyond investigation and description. This class of church attendants are very trying to a nervous preacher. From the time they enter the church, they hardly know how to pass the time away. They will fidget about, first at one thing, then at another, until a nervous minister is almost tempted out of compassion, to cut his sermon off short in the middle. After all the available means to while away the time have been spent, they will sometimes annoy the whole congregation by going out, and making as much noise as possible about it, before the discourse is over.

I am glad, however, with all these different classes, the majority come there to hear the Word of God. There they sit. Where ever you turn, their faces are fully turned toward you, and the very expression gives the preacher inspiration and courage. Their countenances are not hard and expressionless, and as the words strike them they seem to dash against them, and come whirling back to you again, but you see the eyes and the mouth and ears drink in every thought, that when the minister comes down from the stand, he feels as if every thought and idea has been drained out of him. These are the people to whom you feel you came to preach.

Now after a minister has been preaching to the same sea of upturned faces for years, and you know that they have come there through much sacrifice and trouble, a conscientious minister feels the responsibility. He is anxious that the waiting souls shall be filled. It is astonishing sometimes how little satisfies them.

For a minister to preach to the same congregation year after year, telling the same old, old story, it is no wonder he gets nervous for fear he will not satisfy the expectations. To dish up the gospel story so that it will be palatable and nutritious is no small task. To see the look of disappointment on those who came with eager hearts to the sanctuary is discouraging to the sensitive preacher.

This, then, is one of my observations, that a very commonplace, matter-of-fact, smooth, monotonous, every day, unpointed sermon does not make a very deep impression. The minister may say nothing but truth, and he may say it pleasantly and plainly, yet it does not seem to take the right kind of hold. It does not tear up the soul, and make the thoughts fly here and there all through every crevice and nook of the brain and heart, until a man feels that every chord in his being has been touched.

The gospel is sometimes like sand paper or a file. In some person's hands it has been rubbed over the same place so long that it is quite smooth, and so fails to be felt. It must be turned around and over, so that a new part will come into active play, until it will take hold and cut and scrape. Some of the irregularities of our natures need filing and rasping down.

How often the good souls under the smooth-sand-paper-kind of preaching find themselves nodding off to sleep. The more they try to keep awake, the more the sweet monotone voice of the good preacher lullabys them to a sweeter and faster dose. The body is worn out and fatigued with the labors of the week, and the mind too is wearied, so it needs something unusual to arouse the dormant faculties.

Then to nullify the lullabying tendency of the sermon, there must be some fire and spirit and energy and everything else in it that will have a tendency to arouse. So in my humble judgment the minister is justified in making his sermons so that they will attract attention.

Then in the second place I have noticed that when the usual and regular routine of services are deviated from, they will take hold and accomplish some good.

Let the preacher go with a determination to arouse and astonish. Let the text be something to startle. There is more in selecting and even reading a text than some people think. I have heard some good brethren read the text, and hold the book so close to them, and keep their eyes so steadfastly on the Bible, that if we did not know better, we would think this was the first time they ever saw it. Then it would be so long that the people would forget the first part before they had got to the close. Beside this it will be read in such a tone as if the minister thought the whole congregation was at his elbow. Let the text be as brief as possible, so that the people can well remember it. Every word should ring out crisp and clear.

Then when you have the attention of the people, by giving them an unusual text, that will make the congregation wonder what you are going to make of it. You will see all the different classes mentioned above take an interest and feel as if they must listen: Once you have gained the attention and aroused the curiosity, it is not so hard to keep them interested.

This is what the magazine writer calls, "a ringing of changes upon texts." Nobody wants the purely sensational. The plain facts and teachings of the gospel is what is needed, but some fire and the unusual is required to send it home. That which only tickles the ear never reaches the soul. It is not ear-tickling but heart-tickling that the churches need. It is not the mere eloquent and oratorical and purely logical that are the best preachers, it is he who reaches the heart and produces penitence, humility, reverence and good works. The Bible is full of startling texts that just suit every discourse, then let us hurl them red hot into the congregation. This followed by plain, practical facts earnestly spoken is what the people want.

Some of us spin out the gospel web so fine that we can neither see nor feel it.

EDWARD MASON.

The Pennsylvania Conventions.

The Tenth Annual Sabbath School Convention of Pennsylvania, held at Johnstown on the 25th and 26th of September was a very creditable meeting. The sessions were characterized by zeal for the cause and interest in the topics discussed. It was a successful convention, in the full sense of the term. There was a good representation from the several churches of the state. Eld. W. L. Spanogle, moderator, and Eld. A. D. Gnagey served as Secretary. A synopsis of the meeting will be submitted for publication by the Secretary, and the report will not here be anticipated.

The State Conference opened on Thursday morning. The brethren were like men commencing a new and strange work. They hardly knew where to take hold. But after viewing the work before them for awhile, they commenced in earnest. This being written before the convention was far on the way it does not speak from viewing the work done. But the spirit was commendable, and from that the result will be satisfactory and a benefit to the Brethren cause in Pennsylvania. A report of this will also be published in due time, and it shall not be here anticipated.

EDITORIAL NOTES.

"The Old Dispensation a Type of the New," is the title of a sermon, soon to be published, from the pen of Eld. E. Mason. It was preached in reply to a Lutheran minister, who undertook to abolish trine immersion.

That is a grand work that Frank Yoder reports for the University. If pastor and people were everywhere so favorable to the University and educational interests of the church, not only one but three schools would grace the name of the Brethren Church before ten years pass.

Eld. J. H. Swihart is writing a book, and the purpose was to publish it this fall, but as the work to be done is considerable, it will be deferred until next year. Those who may be expecting it will make note of this and expect a better book when it comes.

Never seek to get something for nothing. Make it your principle to give a just equivalent for what you receive. This is law and gospel with God, and he should be obeyed rather than men. If all men would follow that rule, a wonderful flow of peace, contentment and happiness would prevail.

Benevolence begets benevolence was forcibly demonstrated at the M. E. Conference in this place last week. That church is educating thousands of people free of expense, and when they go out as toilers they in turn share liberally of their money to sustain the church. "Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return after many days."

An Agent of the Freedmen's Aid Society addressed the District conference of the M. E. Church in this place last week. He showed that the M. E. church, through this Society, has established about forty schools in the South during the last twenty years, and have educated free, more than one hundred thousand white and colored people of both sexes, as teachers, artisans and preachers. Our heart sank within us when the speaker recounted how they supported several hundred teachers in those institutions wholly out of the benevolence of the church and people, and we are not able to get one school started. God save us.

Doctrine is a powerful weapon for the evangelist to handle in his labor against error and sin, but it is a stale old loaf to build up the body of Christ. Christ never preached a sermon on baptism, washing feet or the communion. He gave simple commands to his disciples on these questions. When he preached he told the people how to become spiritually minded.

The War Cry, the organ of the Salvation Army advises members to pursue this course with reference to the ordinances: "If you are quite sure that God has called you to observe certain ceremonial usages you have either to obey or become disobedient; it is a matter for your own conscience, and no man has a right to dictate to you in it. You must, however, be careful in distinguishing between the direction of God's Spirit and the inclinations of your own mind." It is not the rule of the Army to observe any of the ordinances.

St. Paul gloried in the cross of Christ. What have we to glory in besides it? Our works are no better than the works of others; we are no more devoted than others, our piety does not excel, our benevolence is no freer and broader. No, only the cross of Christ is left us as an object to glory. May its power and beauty never be shrouded by the cloak of praise that may be bestowed, unmerited, upon our deeds. After doing all we are able, we are still to esteem ourselves unprofitable servants.

The state of feeling existing among the Children of Israel during the journey through the wilderness portrays to us our own, under many circumstances. We are not content to trust God and his promises and we suffer in consequence. In Egypt they wandered so far away from God that forty years of education and trials were necessary to bring them under submission again.

At the water of Meribah Moses and Aaron smote the rock contrary to the direction of the Lord, to bring forth water. They were angry with the rebellious children, and did the miracle in their own names. Aaron soon died, and Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land because he did not honor God on that occasion. How often men fail to receive the blessings of God on account of becoming arrogant while presuming to do his work. "Give God the glory," is the motto that should guide the servants of the Lord.

Is the world growing better? is an old question. We answer yes, in the aggregate. Our portion of it as a nation may not be, but it is not all of the world. Nations, are like trees they get old and die. As age comes on they become corrupt. To exist many ages, reformations are necessary. America may experience a reformation, within the next decade which will give it a new lease of existence, in putting down the rum traffic and restoring respect for the Lord's day. Then peace will flow as a river and the nation will appear much better.

Out side of America a grand revolution is in progress and the nations shrouded in heathenism are enjoying the beautiful light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The imprisoned evangelist, William F. Davis, has written from his cell in Boston jail to Mr. Samuel A. Pratt of Worcester an impressive letter which the latter has published. He says that the chairman of the committee that assumed control of the Boston parks and forbade the preaching of the Gospel in them; the district attorney who persecuted Mr. Davis; the Irish Roman Catholic rumseller and alderman who was most interested in passing the gag ordinance; Judge Bacon who pronounced the four sentences against the preacher in a single trial, giving the highest possible penalty under the law—all these men have lately fallen by death. The hand of God seems to be displayed in judgment upon these public officers. Will it also fall upon the great city which allows such iniquity?—Ex. Yes it will in due time, unless like Ninevah, it repents.

The morality of an action depends upon the motive from which we act. If I fling half a crown to a beggar with intention to break his head, and he picks it up and buys victuals with it, the physical effect is good; but with respect to me, the action is very wrong.—Johnson.